

**VETERANS BENEFITS AWARENESS TASK FORCE**  
**MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION**  
**Wednesday, February 25, 2004 — 10:00 AM**  
**Room 500, Harry S. Truman State Office Building**  
**Jefferson City, MO**

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In attendance:

**Governor Bob Holden**, State of Missouri; **Lt. Governor Joe Maxwell**, State of Missouri; **David Cosgrove**, Chief Legal Counsel, Governor's Office; **John Eckhoff**, Veterans Service Manager St. Louis County Dept. of Human Services; **Ralph Durnbaugh**, Director Veterans Benefits Awareness; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Lt. Governor Joe Maxwell**, State of Missouri; **Kyle Clower**, Elderly Advocate, Lt. Governor's Office; **Courtney Fadler**, Director of Communication, Lt. Governor's Office; **Carl H. Niewoehner**, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary, Missouri Veterans Commission; **James Hughes**, Veterans of Foreign Wars; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant Director, Missouri Veterans Commission; **James Whitfield**, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Emmett Fairfax**, Chairman Missouri Veterans Commission; **Joseph Frank**, American Legion; **Jerry Bay**, Disabled American Veterans; **Lynn Dorrell**, American Legion; **Alan Gibson**, VVA MO State Council; **Ernie Lee**, President, MAVO; **Carson Ross**, Vice Chairman Missouri Veterans Commission; **Ron Taylor**, Executive Director, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Mayor J.P. Evans**, West Plains; **Mayor Bob Wasson**, Sedalia

- I. Opening Remarks** – Joe Maxwell, Lt. Governor, State of Missouri, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and stated what a delight to have the Governor join in today. Lt. Governor Maxwell stated he has appreciated serving as the Chairman for the task force and he thanked the Mayors for coming to the meeting today. Based upon the direction the task force is now moving, the Lt. Governor stated he is extremely excited with where we are and where we are poised to be in the future. He thanked the Commissioners, Ron Taylor, staff and service organization leaders for all the work they do in serving the veterans. Teamwork---- setting a mission, outlining the responsibilities and moving forward to accomplish that mission. Six supermarkets have been planned this year. Lt. Governor stated he is grateful for the having the opportunity in serving as the Chairman for the task force. Based on personal circumstances Lt. Governor Maxwell will not be running for re-election and thus is turning the chairmanship of the task force over to Governor Bob Holden. Lt. Governor Maxwell noted the many things the Governor has done to help the task force get to where we are today. The Governor supported the toll free service and found the funding to allow the task force to move forward. The Governor this year is recommending over \$100,000 in increases in state funding to go to VBATF outreach efforts and in addition two new state Veterans cemeteries were opened since the Governor took office. Lt. Governor Maxwell then welcomed Governor Holden aboard as the new chair of the task force.

**II. Governor Bob Holden** – Governor Holden opened by thanking the Lt. Governor and stated he will try to live up to the standards the Lt. Governor has set. He thanked Ron Taylor for his work at the Commission. Governor Holden noted he has the opportunity on a regular basis to listen to veterans issues and concerns in this state. His participation every year in the American Legion Missouri Boys State continues to make an impact on him when he listens to all the Legionnaires talk about what has happened to them in the last year or their friend or their families. He stated we have a responsibility to protect this nations freedoms so that we can all pledge allegiance to the flag and deal with pride, but we have a responsibility to, to uphold our end of the bargain as a free society to make sure that we are doing all we can to make sure we give those men and women their just do when they come home. The Governor said he is delighted to assume the role as chairman for this organization. He thanked Carson Ross for his Leadership. He stated because of the work of this task force the goals have not only been met but exceeded. The toll free hotline set up in 2002 has taken over 5,300 calls giving our veterans information about the benefits available to them. Over 3,800 veterans have attended the 16 Veterans Supermarkets we have held across the state to find out what benefits and services are available to them. Thank you to Lt. Governor Maxwell for being the leader of this and to everyone for being a part of this he stated. As a result of these efforts from August 2002 to August 2003 an additional 2,000 veterans have signed up for VA benefits. Veteran payments coming into our state in that same time period increased by \$54 million boosting Missouri's economy. There are still thousands of Missouri Veterans we have not reached yet, three areas in particular where we need to refocus our efforts. Outreach to veterans in our major metropolitan areas, outreach to our minority veterans and outreach to our large number of new veterans that are being created by our National Guard and Reserve members returning home. In the new budget the Governor recently proposed putting in money for one (1) Minority Veteran Coordinator position to lead this outreach effort; and recommended an additional \$50,000 to staff the organization for highly successful Supermarkets. The Governor noted he is excited about the recently created Mayoral Advisory Committee on Veterans which is another effective tool for us to help with our aggressive outreach efforts. The Mayors serving on this committee can help bring our veterans outreach program to the grass roots level and build community support. He also charging them with creating a model that any community in Missouri can use to successfully reach veterans at the grass roots level and ensure that they receive the benefits an services they are entitled to. Two Mayors with us today Mayor Bob Wasson of Sedalia and Mayor J. P. Evans of West Plains were introduced. He stated these mayors where picked for understanding their community, know where to reach in their community and also having the sensitivity and commitment to reach the community that we are trying to reach. The Governor looks forward to working with all as we support our veterans in our state. He wants Missouri to be looked at as model of how we treat our veterans when they come back from protecting us.

**III. Introduction of VBATF Members** – Ron Taylor thanked the Governor Holden and Lt. Governor Maxwell for all their support to make this possible. He stated there are still things to accomplish and that we will discuss restructuring the committees to develop a few new approaches. Committees will meet and submit a report within the next 45 to 60 days to the Chairman. He introduced the members of the task force. Hundreds if not thousands of volunteers have helped make at Supermarkets and other outreach efforts and all have them have played critical roles in doing that. Communities continue to call requesting Supermarkets. Many supermarkets have been planned across the state where communities have previously held one and can now plan with little help from the Commission. Currently underway for the task force members to think about are to look over the next year as things that may tie into with what we are already doing in the target areas: 1) Mayoral Advisory Committee on Veterans - Mayors of the committee will see what they can do to involve more communities; 2) Minority Veterans Focus Group – first meeting will be held in April, Carson Ross has volunteered to head this group; 3) University of Missouri Senior Media Class – class project to develop outreach tasks looking at what we have done in the past, and how that may either may or may not be effective in reaching those groups we are specifically targeting over the next year. Preliminary presentation should be ready by the next VBATF meeting. Final product should be completed by the Commission meeting and ready to present. Mr. Taylor also announced the Ralph Durnbaugh will be retiring from the Commission effective May 1.

**IV. VBATF Update** – Ralph Durnbaugh addressed his personal thank you to Lt. Governor Maxwell for his leadership and guidance over the past two years. He informed the Lt. Governor of his positive impact he has made to the people in the field. He also stated the same goes for the support we have received from the Governor and he looks forward to working with the Governor in the future. Over 3, 800 veterans were reached at the past sixteen supermarkets. From those contacts we have originated thousands of new claims that have not been submitted before. As the Governor mentioned that numbers indicate that we are in fact reaching some of those veterans but we still have more to reach as evidence by our high attendance at our latest supermarket in St. Joseph in January. He stated lessons have been learned along the way, most effective efforts at benefits awareness, we discovered, come when local people plan it and execute that plan within their community. The Commission was very excited when we heard the idea from Mayor Lowery, Florissant of forming a mayors advisory group for veterans affairs challenging other mayors to do the same in their communities. A tremendous response has come from the Mayors. The Lt. Governor sent out letters to the Mayors inviting them to join in this effort and two of the Mayors here today have taken up that challenge and have been extremely active in veterans benefits awareness programs in their own communities. Although we did not have the resources to adequately respond to those mayors who wanted information on the program and wanted some guidance and help on what kind of a program, what can I do, we are grateful the Governor has appointed this initial committee on veterans affairs and we will expect those mayors to take that experience that they

have already used in their committee, their knowledge and enthusiasm for veterans affairs to reach every Missouri veterans aware of the benefits that are out there and put them in contact with a service officer that can help them. He stated the Commission appreciates everything everyone has done, John Eckhoff for teaching us how to do supermarkets and to him and his assistant Kathy Sturgeon who wrote the manual that we use for preparation for new supermarkets. Lt. Governor Maxwell stated he would like permission to send out a letter on Lt. Governor letterhead to service officers thanking them for their hard work. Jim Whitfield made a motion to accept the Lt. Governor's proposal. Carson Ross seconded the motion. By a voice vote the motion passed unanimously. The Veterans Commission will provide those names to the Lt Governor's office. Before leaving, Governor Holden said the mayors and others should think about the fact that there are really multiple benefits about what we are talking about in the outreach, number one concern the individual-get them the services that they deserve. Number two by helping them get connected it helps the state by the amount of money generated to Missouri; and thirdly, the more we can reach out and get them the services they need then it shows the federal government we need the resources to take care of all of our medical needs in this state. He noted we have an aging population in general, we have a lot of veterans that have not been receiving these benefits and so if we can show the demand in this state is there then we as a state have a better opportunity in getting the federal government to live up to there responsibility more than they have in the past. Veterans benefits awareness helps us as a state, as a community and it helps our economics. The Governor stated this is a win-win situation for everybody involved the more aggressive we are in this effort.

## **BREAK**

### **Break Out Session**

Missouri Veterans Commission Chairman Emmett Fairfax presented the Mayors with certificates signed by the Governor and Lt. Governor recognizing them for their contribution in raising veterans' benefits awareness.

Ron Taylor asked the task force members to decide what committee they would like to serve on within the task force and did committee assignment:

**Mayors Advisory Committee** – Mayors

**Minority Area Committee** – Carson Ross (Chair), Jim Hughes, Hal Dulle, Chad Schatz

**Resource Development Committee** – Carl Niewoehner, Emmett Fairfax

**Vietnam Era Veterans** – Alan Gibson (Chair), Lynn Dorrell, Joe Frank, Hal Dulle

**Metropolitan Area Committee** – John Eckhoff (Chair), Larry Daniels, Hal Dulle, Sharon Keith

**Returning Veterans** – Ernie Lee (Chair), General Shull, Jim Whitfield,  
Ron Taylor, Jill Talken

Ron Taylor noted that the MU Media Group is also looking into working on advertising efforts. It was advised that we check on billboard advertising and also contact Gaming Commission about tagging on to their advertising.

James Hughes stated that the task force should contact legislators to promote veterans benefits in their districts newsletters.

Each committee chair is asked to submit a report to Chairman, Governor Holden within the next 60 days as to what is being done in your committee.

The committees met in break out groups.